

March 25, 2015

Senator Scott Sales
Chair, Senate Judiciary Committee
64th Montana Legislature

Montana Coalition
Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

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RE: Testimony in Opposition to HB 587

Mr. Chair and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

The Montana Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence rises in opposition to **HB 587**. If HB 587 becomes law, a woman's ability to obtain medical care in Montana's remote areas will be severely limited.

According to a 2011 MT DPHHS report, 76% of Montanans live in rural communities. Telemedicine is very helpful to rural citizens for low-risk procedures and office visits. People in rural communities need not drive long distances for a visit that can be accomplished remotely. They do not have to miss work, obtain additional child care, and bear the financial burden of driving hundreds of miles for healthcare. Further, telemedicine can shoulder the burden of loss of providers in some of our rural communities.

Victims of domestic and sexual violence must have access to telemedicine for a medical abortion. Reproductive coercion is a real problem for victims of intimate partner violence. Reproductive coercion involves a partner forcing a woman to get pregnant, hiding or undermining a partner's birth control, and/or threatening a partner until she has no choice but to get pregnant. A study completed by the National Domestic Violence Hotline in 2011 showed that 25% of the survivors surveyed had experienced some type of reproductive coercion by their partner. These women are in danger. Further, we know that there is a prevalence of sexual assault in our communities. Victims may find themselves pregnant as the result of a rape and may have to make a difficult decision to terminate their pregnancy.

This bill would undermine medical decision-making for pregnant women and health care providers, which often must be done quickly and under terrific stress. Additionally, for our clients, these decisions must be made in the interest of the woman's safety if she has an abusive partner. Like all other women, domestic violence and sexual assault survivors should have the opportunity to choose for themselves discreet medical care without the additional financial and safety burdens of travel over long distances.

Please vote do not concur on HB 587.

Robin Turner
Public Policy and Legal Director, MCADSV

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